

Supreme Court ruling dooms transportation tax

[By Doug Murphy | AFN](#)

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The Arizona Supreme Court ruled Tuesday that in effect the TIME initiative didn't have enough signatures, thereby dooming the proposed 1-cent sales tax hike that would have raised \$42.6 billion for transportation over the next 30 years.

Some of the money could have been used to cover projected cost overruns on the South Mountain Loop 202, which is estimated to cost at least \$600 million more than originally thought.

"There is only so much you can tax people," said Jim Jochim of Ahwatukee Foothills, who was opposed to the TIME initiative, and is the treasurer of PARC (Protecting Arizona's Resources and Children), which is opposed to the Loop 202.

The high court agreed with a lower court's ruling that supporters of TIME, which stands for Transportation and Infrastructure Moving Arizona's Economy, waited too long to challenge Secretary of State Jan Brewer's decision that the initiative was short 15,000 valid signatures to qualify for the November ballot.

Supporters saw it as a blow to Arizona's quality of life.

"This is a sad day for Arizona. The Supreme Court's decision means that Arizonans will not have a choice this November to address the state's critical transportation needs by voting on Prop. 203," said Marty Shultz, treasurer of the TIME Initiative Campaign.

Arizona Department of Transportation Director Victor Mendez said in June that Arizona is facing a shortfall in transportation funding and that by 2015 will mean no new construction outside of Maricopa and Pima counties, which have their own voter-approved funding sources. At the same time, Arizona's population is expected to nearly double by 2025.

While the need for transportation improvements from new freeways to light and heavy rail is clear, support for TIME was tepid from the start.

A key element, tacking a fee onto new homes to help pay for the congestion urban sprawl crates, was eliminated early on as part of a deal to garner the support, or at least no opposition, from the Homebuilders Association of Central Arizona.

The Sierra Club opposed the initiative because there was too much money for freeways and too little for alternative forms of transportation. At the same time some lawmakers, including Rep. Russell Pearce (R-Mesa), opposed the initiative because it had too much alternative transportation and not enough freeways.

Jochim said the defeat raises a bigger question about transportation and urban sprawl and how people will get around in a world of high fuel prices.

"Maybe, with the price of fuel rising people are starting to say we are going to have to change our transportation plans, that people can't live in the city of Maricopa and work in Buckeye," Jochim said.

TIME supporters say they will gather in the fall to determine how to address the transportation needs of the state, which means just one thing for Jochim; "My personal view is that TIME will resurrect itself in the next election cycle."